

Full draft submission for QI Special Edition

## Re: Silences. The sensing of sound.

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*Art is life playing to other rhythms*

(Barberry 2006: 272)

*There are times when one sound is heard; there are times when many things are heard*

(Schafer 1977:159)

The prefix Re- denotes three actions, which are important to and for this work. The first is that Re- indicates a return, a repetition or a restoration – right now, we cannot say which of these we would like to invoke as we do not yet (k)now - silence is more than a letter. Secondly, the prefix Re renders the addition of adverbs such as 'back' or 'again' as unnecessary. The work of Re- is to do exactly that – to repeat actions in ways that place emphasis on the repetition. Re- does the work of repetition; the difference is in the reading. Silence can and does fall in these spaces. Thirdly Re-contracts pronouns eg. "we're", "you're" rather than "we are" "you are" – it takes the certainty out of beingness whilst remaining connected by an apostrophe, they said, slightly twisting the words of the Oxford English Dictionary.

It all began with silence, or so we would like to believe but we would also like to suggest that there is no such thing as absolute silence and even if there was, it is not a place that can be inhabited, much less a site to cite ourselves from. Silence is perhaps more emblematic in that once experienced to some degree it cannot be forgotten or confused. It is perhaps also emblematic in the sense of being thrown or being inserted into. In both these senses silence functions or is called into being but as we will go on to say, such workings need to both question and challenge transcendental notions as well as any assumptive workings within texts, affects and resonances. We want to argue that in any silence there is always a sensing of sound.

What happens when we imagine the sounds of the world? Sound comes back to us and we listen, we have to, though some sounds find our ears differently. This article seeks to explore what work silence does morally, ethically, philosophically and pedagogically. We explore our subjectivities as specific configurations of forces and affectivities rather than as rational, autonomous individuals. Critical theory relies upon conceptions of rationality and reason where silence has to be spoken and ousted from its corners but we argue as Bottici and Challand do *that "the individual and the 'multitude' are nothing but a specific configuration of affectivity"* (2011:71) So, how else can we read the air? The article is also about an exploration of how theory can be put to work in opening out such imperceptible sites towards different and differential kinds of listening.

*Gor gaped in disbelief. When he tried to speak, no sound came forth; his mind had forgotten the pathway to his voice.* (Albom 2012:77)

***Why this? Why now?***

*If the three ages of the concept are the encyclopedia, pedagogy and commercial, professional training, only the second can safeguard us from falling from the heights of the first into the disaster of the third.* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:12)

We are teacher educators and researchers in Higher Education institutions in the UK. We have come together to share and trouble some pressing questions about the nature and quality of provision as well as our shifting roles within the institutions in which we work. We are reading ourselves as we write in that we are trying to make sense of the resonant bells whilst knowing how impossible this task is in any definitive sense. We are caught between hankerings for modernist certainties and postmodern doubt; between every academic and pedagogic argument going and between the body politic and a disembodied discourse. Why read on you might ask? but we invite you to do so as we attempt *“to see with our minds and think with our eyes”* (and ears!) (Blanchot 1982:207)

In troubling a notion that full speech or presence can ever equate with the truth we remain committed to working in educational and social worlds and to making a difference in, and to, the lives we encounter. Education is not a substance that goes through changes - it is a capacity for change and becoming from which all educative experiences are formed. It is to value differences over the significance of any unity or purity of thought, concepts, practices, materiality and expression. In doing so, we are valuing the overturning of questions in favour of arriving at a renewal of the problems. As Barthes reminds us we do not wish to *“oppose realities to words as if language is the only futile decor”* (1981/2010:197) Our utterances are also affected by previously unknown factors and forces.

Silences work in the spaces where uncomfortable truths live. They niggle at the margins, forget the pathways to our voices, refuse to speak out, distort our stories. Silence easily translates into fear where we are no longer able to say what we want or what we think. As teacher educators we have become as Kanengori might say *‘silent performers in an empty theatre where high sounding words’* (1997:132) (and we are using our own here) such as education, empowerment, partnerships become devoid of meaning and where we silence them forever... *‘the struggle continues’* (ibid 132) Sarah Maitland adds a question. *‘Is silence in the hearing or the speaking?’* (2008:27) Our colleague Janet Batsleer responded to Maitland by saying *“All silence is waiting to be broken”<sup>1</sup>* and we agree though would prefer to say that silences can be reconfigured if we can learn to listen differently to our ‘good’ and ‘common’ sense!

The authors’ early communications with each other had silences too as we attempted to come together by email, in person, in telephone conferences, across texts – scenarios of silence where we address our discomfort, guilt, fields of diversions. Barthes writes, we *“cannot accept the myth whereby theory puts practice back on an even keel and practice in turn straightens theory. This dialectic holds true for politics but could never be that simple for language”* (Barthes 1981/2010:235) We proceed by hesitation and improvisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Maitland, S (2008) Silence. Granta Books p28 for the full version of Janet Batsleer’s provocative and insightful letter to Sarah on this topic

*Bring nothing with you...*

‘Keep thinking’....  
....’still want to do’,  
‘Know you want to have a go’  
‘Will go with whatever you do’ ‘Time  
wise’  
‘Finiding space’, finding letters How  
good can ‘good’ sound?  
‘Taking all my props and bits and bobs’  
‘Tricky, getting people together, isn’t it?’  
‘I will respond’  
Nothing is more precious than life  
And then they lost their voice  
‘Speak soon (ha ha)’

[Source: compiled from specific phrases from email communications across the authors Sept/Oct 2012]

History greeted us with all its bells, gestures and sounds. The ‘this and that’ of intention, the ‘such and such’ of spaces, the ‘one step, two step’ of our dance towards what we do not and cannot yet know, a phrase from me to you, from you to me, a wordless knowing of what to do - we tuned into each others rhythms and searched the alleys and passageways, the gaps, the in-betweens. Pedagogically speaking, trust and hope are crucial. Without them, silence hurts and punishes even though we are assured, philosophically, pedagogically and politically, that absolute silence does not exist ( Cage, 1961, Bruneau 1973, Vogelín 2011) it is still possible to sense.

Listening produces dynamic subjectivities that are entwined, responsive, and enmeshed with the material and expressive world around them. These are as Vogelín describes ‘fragile ‘I’s’ passing in the dark (2011:94). The listener’s sense of agency is at work in the silence - joining, conjoining sense ‘*compelling him to voice rather than giving him one.*’ (Ibid:94)

In seeking to explore the problematic nature of silence for both teachers and researchers we attempt to story some illustrations that include and resist the reasons for their breaking. We do this to illustrate the partial and fragmentary relationship that necessarily operates in the relay between theory and practice and in asserting that *Theory does not express, translate or apply practice – it is practice* (Foucault 1977:208) There is always a multiplicity even within the person who is supposedly speaking and acting and we search for those silences where thinking pauses, halts, recoils upon itself. The following texts (deliberately arranged in differential textual tones ) are thrown into our ring of communications:

### **Example one: Silence in teaching and learning**

We suggest that silence offers an alternative perspective of how learning occurs, and by association how teaching is conducted, and that such a configuration enjoys a theoretical underpinning that has been by-passed in heady and earnest explorations of teaching and learning theories, particularly those of the social learning family. As an example, Vygotsky's (1978) work on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the more knowledgeable other (MKO) offer a robust case for dialogue between learners or between learners and teachers, a dialogic approach that many practitioners embrace in the form of paired work or group work – overt face-to-face dialogue focused on the learning outcomes. Have a tick in the "Good" box for that. *However*, Vygotsky's (1962) early work on the relationship between talk and thinking as a primary process for cognitive development and maturation has received much less commentary. What is the relationship between such lack of commentary and the notion that talking is equated with learning? How does such a relationship stand up when located alongside the learner who talks when they should be listening? *This is problematic.*<sup>2</sup> Likewise, trainee teachers are implored, repeatedly it seems, to reflect on their practice and subsequently produce reflective journals (see your module handbook for the minimum word count and take note of the 10% margin) in which they are expected to bear their souls in an outpouring (suitably underpinned by relevant theories and evidence of reading within their subject specialism) of affective inner speech. Such inner speech is silent. How could it be otherwise?

Yet just listen to the changes in tone in this one section of text. It begins by suggesting certainty 'silence offers an alternative' (not might, or could or maybe – it does.) Verbs are invoked to do the work of being .

'teaching is'

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<sup>2</sup> Text has been italicised to help reader locate the phrase in the reading that follows

‘configurations enjoy’  
‘underpinnings that have been bypassed’  
‘Vygotsky’s work offers’ ‘dialogue is  
focused’.

We read language as meaning but listen to what is also at work here, what is being animated and activated in the service of the verbs and all from a moment in the present. It is happening and the happenings are in a present tense. But what does silence really offer? Can a configuration enjoy? Is teaching an entity that exists? And what exactly is bypassing the underpinnings? In other words, how is a sense of a present being moved into a past? Then something pivotal happens in the text. A ‘good in the tick box’ - certainties pass over and openings are created: doubt appears in the form of ‘however’ ‘early work has received much less commentary’ [obviously than expected] and questions appear. The ‘this’ is now problematic! ‘Trainee teachers are implored to reflect’ ‘expected to bear their souls’ ‘suitably underpinned [no longer bypassed] and the text ends by gesturing towards a future – ‘how could it be otherwise?’

Such workings are silent in that they are not in our conscious control whilst travelling around in our attempts to use language and to story our meanings. Such attempts are always pointing towards our desires to understand, to act, to change, to think differently. In reading the workings of the text there is no intention of trying to uncover truths from their hiding grounds – such a reading could apply to this section of text too – instead, it is an attempt to invoke those aspects that have animated, generated, come into view, emerged through and in time, shocked, resonated and impacted upon us. As Kathleen Stewart says ‘Some-thing happened’ (2007:79) both intentionally and not so intentionally.

### **Example two: Silence is Green**

“It’s on green” I said to my Spanish friend and in silence we cross the road. A moment later “You can say that? He’s on green?” “Well, yes but only because I’m talking about the traffic lights, not the man shaped green light otherwise I should really say, he is green”.

Another silence ensues

“So” [pointing to a woman walking in front of us who is wearing a green coat] “Can I say, *it’s on green?*”

“No, you can’t!”

Consider again what work is silence doing here? What happens when words fail? When understandings fail? The intertwined “I’s” are not solid identities but fleeting and passing through ever changing and evolving subjectivities. There is constant movement between doubt and certainty, between what we hear in the silences and what the words convey. We are called to listen, we are compelled - something doesn’t feel right, or fit or connect with our sense of things. We are on the look out

for a ‘self’ or an ‘other’ or a word or an image of thought and we have caught ourselves in the act.

### **Silence in teaching and learning: as paradoxical strategy.**

Silence is required for listening and by paying attention to and in silence there is an emphasis on composition rather than content. Just how things come together, on what basis, how they approach, connect and interconnect plays emphasis on their connectivities rather than their meanings, content or intentions. Consider this:

You are inviting someone to talk about what matters to them. They recount their experiences, their encounters, their reflections on their encounters. You are trying to meet them in the silence that surrounds, just as you are reading this now– the words suggest where that might be but often we fail. Communication is the exception, not the norm and we grasp at each other’s words in attempts to build our own contours, which are not antagonistic with each other - we dance around our differences.

The text continues. Silence, as a concept formation, gets most of us somewhere when we plan teaching and learning sessions, particularly in the subjects of mathematics (ref) and foreign languages (Nunan, 1998) where part of the cognitive process relies on assimilation and transposition whilst also, for different reasons, offering a productive and essential thinking space when there is a written exam. In other contexts and small spaces of potential, there are possibilities and pitfalls for the teacher.

Li (2001) and Ollin (2008) suggest that silence in the classroom reflects a set of assumptions, not only regarding teaching and learning and how they occur and should be conducted “if you are a professional”, but also of Western cultural dispositions which intermingle with the nature of configuration, participation, interaction and symbolism. Silence does not bear such a burden in other cultures, for example, Chinese, Nepalese, Japanese, Aboriginal and American Indian cultures where silence is, on certain terms, highly valued and unchallenged. In Western cultures, talk or dialogue is construed as a participatory function of teaching and learning with the locus of control being either with the teacher (at the teacher-centred end of the pedagogic paradigm) or the learner(s) (at the student-centred polarity) with the place of silence being delegated to a lower positioning on the teacher’s terms. Where such positioning has its origins is open to speculation and debate although teachers tend to privilege that which is fashionably on the performative radar – and silence is not there – well not officially.

Unofficially we are playfully walking through texts, theories, cultural histories and producing fictions of our own. “*I meet the sound as verb and we are both doing*” (Vogelin 2011:96). This is not to undermine the authority of author as Barthes reminds us but asks that we reconsider the authority of authorship and reposition ourselves so that we become the openers of our own narratives, not the experts and

the knowers of others. These are open texts rather than authorial texts which place emphasis on hearing and listening rather than reading as a totality. It is unconventional and committed in that the outcome is not the goal. Instead it is the reproduction of engaging time and time again, the intention of repetition and the capacity to be able “*to work with the generative nature of perception that also generates itself.*” (ibid: 93). A tall order you might say but sometimes the smallest shifts can produce the biggest changes. This text is not paying attention to what is being said per se but is about what we are hearing and how we are composing from the resonances of silence itself.

### **Silence in teaching and learning: the observable, or (K) not.**

The text pauses to include further contributions, soundings if you like, from training manuals, handbooks and guidance for teachers.

Pausing (Ollin, 2008; Rowe, 1974)

*Gaining silence is a common problem for inexperienced teachers...* (Petty, 1993: 78).  
*Students talk when they shouldn't because they enjoy a chat* (ibid., p. 81).

As a guide to maintaining class control: *...sustained eye contact in silence...* (ibid: 91).

*... 'fringe' methods* (Silent Way is cited as an example by Richards and Rodgers, 1986) *perhaps attract more attention than they deserve* (Nunan, 1998:175).

In today's instrumental world of pedagogic practice handed down by Governmental fiat, silence is a cultural artifact to be admonished and brought into dialogic exchange as a central component of a provocative analysis: There was silence. Shame on you. Yet there is a juxtaposition here that questions the value of the observer or inspector being silent when sat at the back of class with a clipboard. The observer is there to observe, not to contribute, but is learning about the learning - in silence. The observer is required to make judgements, tantamount to a witness statement, regarding the overt behaviours of teacher and learners within a culture, context and subject specialism that the observer, very likely, finds alien. Whilst such objectivity is as dysfunctional as it is problematic, we suggest, it entirely misses the dance between teacher and students, a dance performed to the silent tune of the learning objectives and the cultural formation of that community of enquiry as it evolves. Yet, what of silent steps in the dance? Discrete, barely perceptible steps secreted from the prying ears of the Dark Lord with the

clipboard and stolen with disguised celebration.  
One to the good guys. Say nothing... (\*\*\*)

The ten seconds of silence that emerge as we collectively hesitate will create an opening through which new understandings and questions may emerge. We will defer leadership as we fill the void, without instruction by trusting (\*\*\*\*) – we will dramatise the hesitation!<sup>3</sup>

### **Silence as affect and vehicle**

We are in this complex space where our readings and writings are not conflictual but complicating each others, expanding what is possible to say and helping us to think through where we are speaking from and how we are speaking. We are finding our connections through our solitary listenings and our plural writings – our ‘I’s never stay still and produce the political on our bodies from the constant interplay and movement between reading\writing, text\image of thought, noise\silence, language\imagination.

We strive to understand rather than demand an expectation to know and we try to give enough spaces for you to enter as reader to do the same.

A brick whitewashed wall in a Mercedes factory.<sup>4</sup> It was an outside toilet. Someone started a story on the wall and it caught on. People added to it, it digressed, expanded but no doubt was both directed and limited by a narrative form. Nonetheless, once upon a time stories can do more than just their storying but quite often they work largely to keep things ‘as they are’ rather than what they can be, ought to be or might be. Narratives can fix and police just as much as they can open up and complicate. Specific narrative forms shape the way for what can be said, from what has been. This is a view of historical time, which is traditional, conventional and largely keeps things as they are. We need history but our futures need to be open in that there must be an imperative and a capacity to break with our pasts and align ourselves differently to a future if we are not also to be condemned to repeat our mistakes.

*The presence of the present only forms a surface* (Laporte)

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from and introduction to doctoral thesis Patterson, R (XXXX)

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from doctoral thesis Rushton, I (xxxx)

There is always movement in silence. Fruit flies defy the normalcy of time<sup>5</sup>. As a species they get through generations in a week such is their life span! They know more than we do that the future is not an empty space waiting to be colonized.

We experience a pull towards a future, however certain or tentative and yet for Deleuze the future is always already with us. We need to search for what is latent in what already exists. What can we learn from our past modes of listening and hearing? And to our past mappings of sounds and silence? Any sensing involves sensitivity towards, a taking of responsibility and a widening of our imaginations. It is not about finding a blueprint or the generalisable – the plan-act-know cycles might give an appearance that we are in control of outcomes but the fruit flies know that we really proceed by hesitation and improvisation!

*Truth cannot be defined or tested by agreement with the 'world' for not only do truths differ for different worlds but the nature of agreement between a world apart from it is notoriously nebulous (Nelson Goodman)*

We can make all kinds of statement about the nature of silence. We can map its common usages, its familiar faces, its multiple images in our thoughts. But sense is different from statements – sense runs between statements and bodies and it is not just a matter of language on the one hand and materiality on the other. In sense or more specifically sense-events, they occur concurrently. Moreover, what gets passed over, what gets heard, picked up, carried over, is in Deleuze's (1987) terms 'coded' into our language in ways that enable us to communicate with each other but often not in ways that we consciously choose. Which one of us could have known how this article would unfold? The paths it would both open up and close down? The thoughts that emerged and flashed between us and across us - in the writing, the written, the spoken and the heard.

*Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed and to compel obedience...Language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits Deleuze (1987:76)*

*There are all manner of voices in a voice, murmurings, speakings in tongues: that is why all discourse is indirect and the translative movement is that of. ...indirect discourse. Deleuze (1987:77)*

For Deleuze the thinker is an actor concerned not with representation but with dramatisation. Questions of who, how, where and when rather than of what is? Silence cannot be inhabited anymore than death – it happens!

The import of silence for writing and for theory is in enabling us to pay attention to what repeats, builds and gets carried over. It engenders collaborations that can do justice to various manners and differentials whilst keeping knowledge on the move. If pedagogy can work in the space that resists knowledge as either encyclopedic (across the planet and over time in a reified sense) or marketised then a notion of how we

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from doctoral thesis Patterson, R (xxxx)

might travel amongst meanings is important and useful to us. It allows us to see/hear our practices of sense making and the formation of sense-events in themselves and know that they are assemblages, which can be connected, disconnected and reconnected.

Have we returned? Repeated? Retreated? Restored? We have attempted to present our findings (findings!) as we have gone along and conveyed our manner of walking together. It goes without saying that any one of us could address the questions we raise, not all of us have at any one time and in that sense the text is collaborative rather than progressive. Indirect discourse invites an ethics as meanings circulate, resonate, and are listened to. It is not easy to work with texts that meander or which can resist paying attention to questions that impose themselves in and from language. In that sense we are aware of having made demands upon the reader too but we have done so to draw your attention to the unchosen, the differentials, to the place of non being yet where we are 'busy being born' as Bob Dylan might say. We have tried to convey the downpour of the vertical, the humpty dumpty of word orders that see silence as oppressive, exclusionary, punishing as well as the wash or spread of the horizontal that soaks and leaks and leaves behind furtive aspects that are capable of creating and crackling. Sferics are the sounds that lightning makes when it touches the surface of the earth. Scientists tell us that they are happening constantly, every minute of every day and although they cannot be heard with a human ear, they are happening and they do sound. We are learning how to keep meanings on the move without recourse to reification or the remorse of relativism. Free indirect discourse is silent in its workings but ears work in pairs and multiples and sense conveys itself at the same time as it materializes. As Louis Armstrong says (and which has to be heard in the grain of his tone!)

*"If you have to ask what jazz is, you ain't ever going to get to know"*<sup>6</sup>

And so,

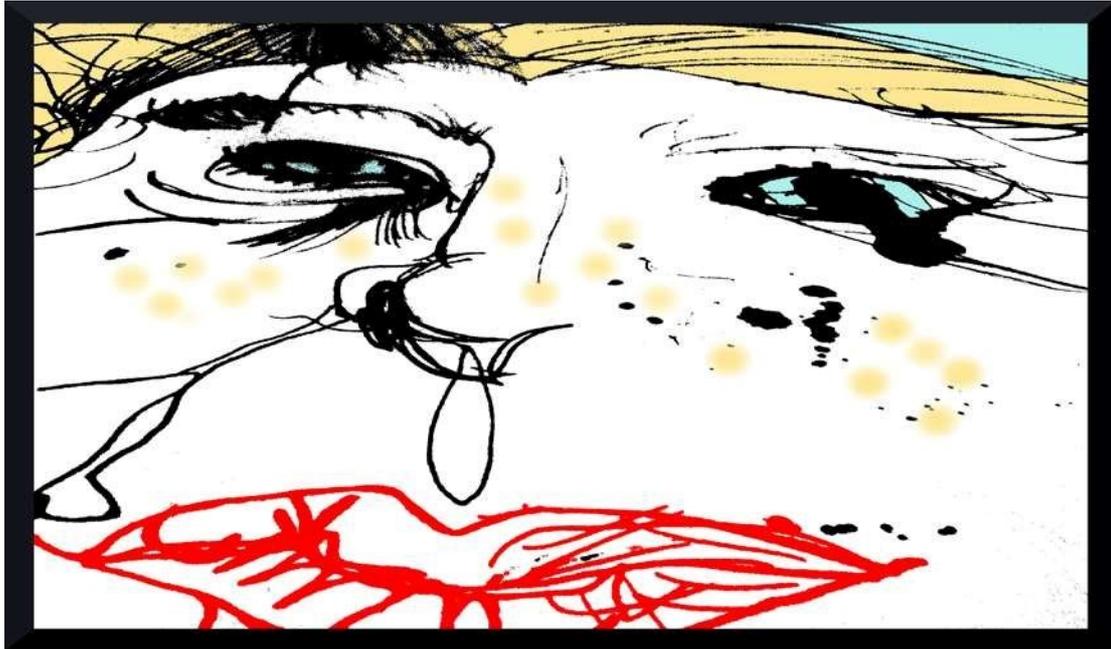
*"[we] stayed outside for a while, planting [our] secrets in the silence of [our] beginnings."*<sup>7</sup> Okri (2003:288)

### **The sounds of silence in education**

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<sup>6</sup> quote remembered from conversation with friends. Can also be found on various websites of famous quotations

<sup>7</sup> original text uses pronoun I which we have changed to a plural [ ] for this article



[The A/r/tographer by Jennyanne Smith. (2012) Visual Arts research Vol 38 No2 Issue 75]

*Now we must choose, said Mercier  
Between what? Said Camier  
Ruin and collapse, said Mercier  
Could we not somehow combine them? Said Camier*

[from Samuel Beckett]

Decisions necessarily divide practice and in doing so they sometimes takes us to places where we do not choose to go. At a micro political level we make hundreds of tiny decisions with words, thoughts, actions, gestures, expressions every minute of every day. "*The quantification of the void.... punctures the qualitative unity of the cosmic animal*" (Brassier 2000) in showing how our subjectivities are both capable of being dissolved and of ways in which they are constituted. *We are reading ourselves as we write* and widening what counts as experience whilst questioning the 'forces' that do the silencing. What renders faces, voices, persons and people silent? In refusing to reproduce the language of the pen we have attempted to interrupt our inscriptions whilst the wash of watery ink tries to dissolve our hankerings for eternal truths. There are no adequate gestures for silence [ ] but we can fail to hear the echoes, we can interrupt our perceptual givens, delay and reconfigure our responses....we can play, dance, laugh and we have done in rhythms which are **both** active and passive; playful and serious; event and encounter. "...*movement ....does not resemble that of the wave*" (Deleuze in Gangle 2013:155) This writing tries to sit within currently defined ways of writing an article for publication and yet ceaselessly listens to the divergences, the silences, the possibilities, the muddles and confusions that make new sentences possible at all.... Shhhh.... Can you hear the labyrinthic thoughts that have come from our inner/outer ears? The sound of ink leaking from our 'I's/eyes? Our lips are sealed in silence where order words and gestures are refused... what sound is possible from such a place? Hopefully a recipiscence that can return a sense of a good and a common to what cannot be known in advance and which must necessarily pass through where a decision has

not yet been reached. Deleuze uses swimming as an image of thought, we have invoked sense - can we somehow combine them? Also, in rethinking and radically challenging how subjectivity, language, temporality and transcendence persists in progressive and critical pedagogies we have tried to draw a reader's attention to the 'twinklings'<sup>8</sup> and 'tweakings' of what is unthought, not yet, in retreat, barely audible, and which nonetheless might address the accidental, the contingent, our inabilities, incompatibilities, confusions, forgetfulness, tardiness, uncertainties, doubts, fears and mistakes. Welcome to a silent world of embodiment...

...Eek!

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#### Notes from authors

- (i) We have intentionally played with different fonts and sizes to indicate differential tones rather than voices
- (ii) Permission will be needed for reproduction of the drawing on p10 from the journal *Visual Arts Research*. We have the artist's permission.

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<sup>8</sup> We are borrowing here from Barthes who uses 'twinklings' as 'happenstances' rather than appeals to pre-established meanings.

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